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The Shah's Secret Police Are Here

By Gregory F. Rose

“... SAVAK agents operate with impunity in America, watching and harassing Iranian dissidents and opponents of the regime ...”

The sidewalk in front of the Iranian Embassy looked like a cops' convention: people from District of Columbia Metropolitan Police, United States Park Police, Federal Protection Service, Secret Service—one moment talking, joking, the next glancing nervously down Massachusetts Avenue to the line of Washington cops, three men deep, between them and the Iranian student demonstrators. A SWAT team, in their blue fatigues, lolled beside their van across from the building that is Brazil's consular annex.

“Shah is a U.S. puppet. Down with the shah,” 60 demonstrators chanted with a rhythmic monotony. Less fierce than weary from their trek from Lafayette Park to the police line 500 feet from the embassy, the only danger afforded the massed officers was, perhaps, sunstroke.

As the demonstration ended, the students rolling up their banners for another time and making their way in

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small clusters for home, the embassy and its operations in the United States. garrison relaxed.

Suddenly a blue, Checker-like sedan—D.C. license DPL 4138—pulled from Massachusetts Avenue into the embassy drive. The doors swung open and four men, one in a white suit, emerged. A bodyguard scanned the street across from the embassy and, seeing a photographer, grabbed the white-suited man, whirling him around, his back to the street. He moved quickly, back still to the camera, from the drive to the ambassador's private entrance at the side of the embassy residence. As he reached the doorway, an Iranian emerged, breathless, from the residence. They conferred, the white-suited man taking a sheaf of papers from his briefcase. A moment later, the second man dashed for a waiting embassy car. With two more steps the white-suited man was in the residence. Moments later the police supervisors arrived. They, too, entered the residence through the ambassador's private door.

The man in the white suit was Mansur Rafizadeh. As chief of station, he heads SAVAK, the shah's secret police,

and its operations in the United States.

SAVAK—the Persian acronym for the National Information and Security Organization—has a sinister reputation. International organizations, including Amnesty International, have repeatedly scored SAVAK for the repression and even torture of dissidents in Iran. Some knowledgeable Western observers have gone so far as to claim that SAVAK maintains greater control over the lives of most Iranians than does the KGB over citizens in the Soviet Union.

A pattern of SAVAK's torture and execution of political prisoners, censorship of the press, denial of due process, and surveillance of suspected opponents has been established by international human-rights monitoring groups. While the Iranian government asserts that there are fewer than 1,000 political prisoners in all Iran, SAVAK's deputy director, Parviz Sabeti, has told Western reporters that 1,000 political prisoners are held in one prison alone, just outside the city of Isfahan, and that SAVAK maintains dozens of prisons around the country. The best estimate

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